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THE GIFT OF
Geo. Wahr

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VERSES

RICHARD KIRK

VERSES

BY
RICHARD Ray KIRK

ANN ARBOR MICHIGAN
GEORGE WAHR
1906

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A VILLANELLE

A VILLANELLE is apropos
For songs of love and songs of spring,
And ecstasies of morning glow.

For roses red and breasts of snow
And soft white arms that twine and cling,
A Villanelle is apropos.

Each word and line is fashioned so,
Delicate as a wedding ring,
Or as a maiden's virgin glow.

Alas! that poets grosser grow!—
For songs that bloom and flowers that wing,
A Villanelle is apropos.

Love is my theme! The ways I go
Are April-flowering; so I sing
Of stars that gleam and eyes that glow.

And thus my song I fashion so.
No epic, ode, or sonneting;
A Villanelle is apropos
For ecstasies of morning glow.

ALONG THE WAY

FOR me the loitering of the road,
The hidden voice that sings;
For me the vernal mysteries,
Deep woods and silent springs.

I covet not the ended road,
The granary, the sheaf;
For me the sowing of the grain,
The promise of the leaf.

THE ROAD

FROM dawn to dusk our road was gold,
But at day's end the scroll was rolled
And taken from us fold by fold.

But when the day arrived once more
And hammered briskly on the door,
There lay the gold road as before.

HE WHO KNOWS A BOOK

WITH staff in hand and dusty shoon,
I walked from morning till high noon;
Then rested for a little while
Upon the green grass by a brook,
And with a morsel and a book
Forgot me many a mile.

And then upon my way I strode
With bending back beneath the load,
Until the night beset my way,
With cheerful thought on song and tale.
And so I fare by hill and vale,
Contented, day by day.

For he who knows a book to read
May travel lightly without steed
And find sweet comfort on the road.
He shall forget the rugged way,
Nor sigh for kindly company,
Nor faint beneath his load.

DUNCAN

DUNCAN comes this way no more;
Never knocks upon the door,
Enters in to sup with us,
Laugh and shout a song.

Here is bread upon the board,
And the larder is well stored;
Here is good tobacco, and
Wine both red and strong.

Duncan was a wanderer;
Loved to hear the wind astir,
And the gossip of the trees,
And the song of rain.

Though the door swing open wide,
Will he never step inside?
Nor the bread and wine entice
Him to come again?

THE HOUSE

I WONDER if he hears the rain
That ripples on the window pane;
I wonder if he hears it now,
The rain he loved to hear.

His roof is softly laid with moss,
His dwelling four sheer walls across;
If sun nor sound endears it now,
How can the house be dear?

Now presently each field of dun
Shall be emblazoned by the sun;
And each green field a ream of spring
To write blue violets in.

His dwelling-place hath porch nor door,
Nor rushes strewn upon the floor;
Yet shall he chance to dream of spring,
How may he bide within?

ROSE OF DEATH

THE last sweet gift that life bestows.
When all the rest like shattered roses
Are scattered o'er the grass, this rose—
White rose of death—upon his breast
reposes.

Ah, crimson garnerings of hours
Soon spent, would he exchange his boon
Of blossom for your fading flowers?
His long cool night for life's fantastic noon!

LIFE

A LITTLE toil before the day
Is done—and then, away!

A little laughter on the road,
And so, a lighter load.

A little fellowship at noon;
A song beneath the moon.

A little gladness and some tears,
To fill the cup of years.

THE MASQUERADE

WE come and go in masquerade,
And pace our measures to and fro;
And so the dance of life is played.

A witling like a king arrayed;
For in disguise we come and go
This merry night of masquerade.

A craven wears the soldier's braid;
The publican's the priest;—and so
The comedy of life is played.

Each dons his garment unafraid;
The trick is learned, and none may know
Who walks with whom in masquerade.

The harlot wins the prince's aid;
Their eyes with lustful fever glow;—
And so the pawns of life are played.

By knave and fool the plot is laid
While merrily the pipers blow.
On with the merry masquerade,
Until the dance of death is played!

SEA MIST

PALE, hapless ghosts of ships that sail again
The treacherous sea-ways they were wont to go,
See how they drift (poor ghosts!) and breast in vain
The gentlest gales that blow.

Fantastic spectres—brigantine and bark
And funneled steamer—rise from troubled graves,
And now the storm breaks forth. Ah, see! and hark!
The moaning of the waves!

NOV 10

IN YOUR LITTLE HOUSE

IN your little house with the green-thatched roof—
With the green-thatched roof and the narrow door—
The narrow door of your little house,
And never a footprint on the floor,
Do you hear the rain and the wind in the trees,
As you lie there tonight at your lonely ease?

In your little house with the green-thatched roof—
With the green-thatched roof and its walls dew-damp—
With its dew-damp walls, and never a shadow
From flickering firelight or lamp,
Do you hear the rain and listen again,
And say, "'Tis only the rain I hear, the rain"?

In your little house with the green-thatched roof—
With the green-thatched roof and its deep content—
With its deep content (please God it be so,
That peace went with you when it went!)—
Do you know that I stand here without your door,
Craving a bed on your sanded floor?

THE WISE AND KIND

I WILL stop thy ears with earth,
  And close thine eyes
On all mirthlessness and mirth:
  I am wise.

I will bind thy eager hands,
  Too unconfined,
In unsullied linen bands:
  I am kind.

I will ease thee of ill thought
  Tongue uttereth,
I who seek thee long unsought:
  I am Death.

LOVE'S EMBERS

AS one who, waking from a heavenly dream,
Remembers, and remembers, yet doth know
How all his years shall pass in even flow
And bear him on the bosom of their stream,
But never nearer that supernal gleam
Which lighted all the world; and he doth go
In shadow ever and in starless woe;—
So is he borne along whose dreary theme

Is Mortal Love. For if, in life or death,
Death doth extinguish that celestial fire
Of love, he, lifeless, bearing the charred brand,
Walks wondering, ever.—Yea, he wondereth,
And, stript of pain and all of live desire,
Marvels to feel love's embers in his hand.

I KNOW THERE WAS A GOLDEN AGE

I THINK the gods are weary, being old;
And they would sleep untroubled by our prayers;
As men grown old thro multiplying cares
Deem youthful ways impertinent and bold.
Somewhat aloof are they, as sires who fold
Their garments closer from the chilly airs
Which youths delight in when October wears
His bright embroideries of green and gold.

Yet once, I know, there was a Golden Age,
Wherein these ancients dwelt when they were young;
And went our ways, and sang the songs men sung,
And felt their strength, and lightly dared engage
In feats of valor, where the winds blew free
Across the meadows by th' Aegean Sea.

IN MEMORIAM

"We are all of us artists, shaping ourselves into something not our present selves out of humanity's common clay."

ARTIST, now is thy task complete;
And from his hands and from his feet
The file's fine dust is blown.
The peaceful face, the placid brow
Express the inner vision now,
The thought which was thine own.

And in the marble from thy hands—
Conserving thine august commands—
If fault or flaw there be,
In part the fault thy judges may
Attribute to the common clay,
And not in whole to thee.

For faithful to thy hidden dream
Thou wert the artist while its gleam
Upon thy purpose fell;
And if thy dream thou sawest fade,
Still shall undying words be said
Of him who labored well.

AN OLD FIRE PLACE

WHEN Summer days come, ye forsake
My settles for the green-wood's sake;
But soon, ashamed, for auld lang syne
Ye bring me oak boles, knots of pine,
And heap my arms with gifts, and I
Crackle forgiveness merrily.

Then on my settles young and old
Gather to hear old tales retold.
Old tongues rehearse them staid and slow;
The younger lisp and prattle so
The tale's half lost in laugh and shout,
And ere I know it I'm half out.

And soon they bring the night-log in;
And in the dim light I begin
To tell my story, old and wise;
So you may dream it, Sleepy Eyes,
When mother tucks you into bed
And smooths the pillow for your head.

YOUR DAYS

YOUR days go softly one by one;
Nor less serenely than the flowers,
Which slowly open in the sun
And sweeten thro the morning hours
And perish in the evening showers.
Each after each the petals fall;
And soon the winter garners all.
But to the gardener will remain
A ghostly fragrance magical
Of roses cherished not in vain.

THE FOOL'S WISDOM

"TO you," exclaimed the king,
"Is life worth anything?"
Answered his Jester, "Sire,
I warm me at your fire."

"And I," His Highness said,
"How am I comforted?"
The Fool observed the fire—
"You have your jester, Sire."

FAILURE

IF someday you awake and see
More truly my unworthiness,
I pray you grant the old caress,
And ponder, "So he sought to be!"

And say, "He sought but could not find,
Attempting much with little skill."
And say, "I cannot think him ill,
Who groped for light tho he was blind."

A LATER MESSAGE

A VILLANELLE, Dear Lady, I
  Dispatch in haste, and bid him say:
"Oh Lady, in the By-and-By,

Tho many pleasant memories die,
  Still let me serve you for a day—
A Villanelle for memory, I."

And let him tell you, Lady, why
  I sped him on his happy way,
Nor come myself now spring is by.

He 'll say: "O Lady, moments fly,
  And tho you chide them they 'll not stay;
A token from the flood am I

That bare him from the watcher's eye,
  A pennant from the battle-fray!"
And, Lady, in that By-and-By,

If he speak loud and boastingly,
  And swear to live, your knight, for ay,
Remember what a braggart I
In promises for By-and-By!

IF FAME OR FORTUNE CALL YOU

IF Fame or Fortune call you,
  And you are urged to roam,
Put money in your purse, lad,
  But leave your heart at home.

O leave your heart at home, lad,
  And take what else you choose,
Or you 'll give Wealth and Wisdom
  To have the heart you 'll lose.

EN ROUTE

TO reach a fair tomorrow
  You ran along this road;
Delay your only sorrow,
  Desire of life your goad.

I too seek that which calls me,
  And may not pause nor stay;
Yet bear whate'er befalls me
  What pack of dreams I may.

YOU WERE PRAISED

YOU were praised in days gone by
For wit and wisdom both, and I
Neither wit nor wisdom had.
But that was yesterday, my lad!

Today your wisdom's quite forgot,
And no one gives you half a thought.
But I eat, drink, am merry, thrive,
And live content to be alive.

GOD-SPEED

O YOU 'LL have dreams for dreaming,
And deeds for doing too;
And roses for the plucking,
Red roses! — yes, and rue!

So put today behind you,
To sniff tomorrow's air;
And loosen in your girdle
The dagger that you wear.

Put dead today behind you,
And spurn him with your foot;
But slip a four-leaf clover,
For luck, lad, in your boot!

Put dead today behind you;
You 'll find the living there!
To try a new lad's mettle,
And drug him with despair.

O you 'll have dreams for dreaming,
And deeds for doing too;
And roses for the plucking,
Red roses! — yes, and rue!

AFTER THE SONG

I AM the string the master snapt—
I knew the mastery of the bow;
I thrilled with song. And now I know
That done with me
The great musician sets me free.

I am the string the master snapt—
I thrill no more with living song.
I know his peace; for brief or long,
Or well or ill,
I yielded to the master's will.

THE UNSEEN PLAYER

NIGHT by night, day by day,
We hear the Unseen Master play
His music, full of woeful sighs,
And laughter, and despairing cries.

As on an organ, so He plays
The City; down whose crowded ways
Impotent pass His puppets—these
Who are His stricken organ-keys.

He touches them to swift affright,
Or stirs their hearts to new delight;
He plays: they weep, or cry aloud,
Or lie as dead men in a shroud.

And still the Unseen Master plays
His mad, mad music thro the days;
And still each wailing puppet bears
His burden thro the thoroughfares.

THE FADING PICTURE

HE can see—where he lies—
Framed within the window's
frame,
One blue fragment of the skies
And a maple, like a flame,

Burning on the forest's edge,
And a strip of meadow dun,
Just above the window-ledge,
Darkened by the autumn sun.

And he gazes long on this,
Growing weaker where he lies,
As on something he may miss
On the walls of paradise;

As on something growing dim,
Something dying, something soon
Vaguely to return to him,
Like a once familiar tune.

He is dying, but he knows
Only that the picture fades,
Only that oblivion flows
Over his beloved glades.

THE GLEANERS

OUT of far fields, through unillumined ways,
With weariness the gleaners bare their sheaves,
With painful ardor gathered straw by straw,
To their great Master, he whose just reward
Fails not, who knows himself their weariness,
And gives to each his due. They came and stood
Before him, and received, and gave him thanks.

And one who wore the gleaner's coat bare not
A sheaf. He also stood; and for a time he spake
No word. No word was breathed by any one of them—
He, nor his Master, nor his brethren there. At last
He dared to look, and dared (at last) to speak,
And said, "Master, I have no sheaf," and dropped his eyes.

And silence deepened, for the Master still
Spake not, nor did his brethren speak.

Then he who wore the gleaner's coat again
Lifted his heavy eyes up to the face
Which smiled upon him as upon a child,
And to the faces of his brethren then,
Which smiled as on the weakness of a child.
Ah! terrible to merit such a smile!
And then he fell before them on his face,
And cried, "O Master! O my brethren, pour
Upon me thy unquenched, consuming hate,
But spare me—I am weak—this heavenly
love!"

DEPARTURE

THIS is the wounded world that lies so white,
Breathless and terrified awaiting death.
This is the world, whose fingers twined in mine
Lose strength, and lie upon the counterpane,
Like shells from which the ebbing flood flows down
Into the deep. This is the world I lose!

This is the world I lose. Whose starry eyes
Looked into mine; whose voice became a song;
Whose lips to mine made music, on a day—
A day I may remember nothing of;
Or was it fair, or were there wars in heaven,
Thunderous wars, or did we idly pluck
Wild roses on that day?—We could not know!

This is the world I lose! O world complete!
I have not wherewithal to hate foul death,
Losing the world. O life that yet remains,
I cannot love thee! This is the world I lose!

I lose thee! O beloved as thou art,
I lose thee!

* * * * * * * * *

This that yet remains
Is but thy garment in my clutching hands.
Thou didst attire thee in this robe of flowers,
And stars, and worlds, and creeping things, and men,
And cities, and strange lands, and flowing seas;
And these were but the broidery on thy robe.
Thou didst require them, but they were not thee.
What are the stars to me now thou art gone!

* * * * * * * * *

Wert thou grown white with shame, thy garment plucked
From off thee? O in thy death-nakedness,
Art thou in hiding in some secret place,
Where I might find thee?

* * * * * * * * *

This gear I wear, for thy sake memoried long,
For thy sake worn, slips from me year by year.
Cities no longer strange, nor longer new
The flowers upon my garment, this sad sphere.
I too shall soon be shamed; and, sudden, pale,
And waver from the world, and be with thee!

* * * * * * * * *

Shall I then find thee, World of my Desire?

* * * * * * * * *

O, I shall be afraid! Remembering how,
Breathless and terrified, awaiting death,
You lay, your fingers twined in mine,
Until they dropp'd, and lay upon the bed,
Like shells from which the ebbing flood fell down!
O, my beloved! I shall be afraid!

ONE WHO WAS UNSELFISH

BECAUSE he did not ask a name
They gave their smiles and tears and crowned him;
And since he could not hope for fame
Contentment came and put her arms around him.

TRUE MIRACLE

"THE age of miracles is past." O clod!
Hast never seen an holy man of God!
Is not this miracle enough, that now
This one may love a creature such as thou?

ESSENTIALS

HAPPY must one be,
If be not denied him
A brook, a lawn, a tree,
And a book beside him!

DREAMERS

EACH waking dreams, and, dreaming, deems he spies
The sightless truth; and, "Hear me, friends!" he cries.
Each dreamer, hearing, laughs the dream to scorn:
"Poor fool, he dreams!" or, "Wretched knave, he lies!"

INFLUENCE

ONE splendid rose makes fragrant all the room;
The sun's small disk how many worlds doth light!
So may a song thro centuries of gloom
Be as a torch by night.

TRUTH

TO ancient bonds of truth new bonds succeed;
Today's dissenter pens Tomorrow's creed.

GOOD PEOPLE

THESE sinners, Lord, know that we worship Thee;
And they revile Thee, Lord, with shrieks and groans:
But Thou hast cursed them at our hands; for, see!
With what good aim, dear Lord, we cast these stones!

SHE WILL NOT

SHE will not speak one little stinging word
So I may go from her upon my way!
She will not speak; her lashes have not stirred!
Who ever smiles; and will not bid me stay!

THE CHOICE

GOD may seem near to you, to me to be far;
You choose a stone to worship, I a star.

THE SAVANT

IN Time's fair garden he fulfilled his hour:
Grubbed at the roots, and brushed aside
the flower.

THE IDEALIST

WHILE men sowed wheat he planted
flowers instead;
Who, famished, marvels men may live by
bread.

FAME

HE wrote one simple little song and
desolate came to die:
A mother sang it to her babe a thousand
years thereby

A PREACHMENT

A SAD young face, sad eyes,
Too sad, and over-wise,
Stays me as I haste to reach
Tempting grape and luscious peach.
"Spoil," said I, "for who will reach!"

So I stay my hand. "And who,
Doleful Face, most droll, are you?"
"Surely yesterday you knew!"

"Surely—surely! Now I see!
I—you—tumbled from a tree,
Climbing up the world to see!

"And again I mind I—you—
Ate green apples, quite a few!
Followed what a how-de-do!

"You 're Experience, I see,
Sad from tumbling from a tree.
You 're Experience! You 're ME!"

Fools in clambering for a crown
Ofttimes fall and crack their own!
In the gallop after riches
Some take headers into ditches!
Luscious grape and tempting peach
Tempt youth most when out of reach!

When *you 've* learned it—*you* can preach!

IN A CANOE

WHAT you thinkin', li'l' moon,
li'l' moon?
What you thinkin'?
Up dyah, with the stars a-winkin',
An' a-blinkin'?
Is you lonesome way up yondah?
Is you 'fraid of rain an' thundah,
Li'l' moon, li'l' moon?

Is you cryin', li'l' moon, li'l' moon?
Is you cryin'?
Seems 'at I can heah you lyin',
An' a-sighin'.
S'pose this dew drop on my fingah
Was a tear 'at wouldn' lingah,
Li'l' moon, li'l' moon?

Don' you listen, li'l' moon, li'l' moon?
Don' you listen?
Jes' to heah the watah swishin',
An' a-hissin'?
Heah the frogs a-plunkin,' chunkin,'
An' the li'l' fishes clunkin',
Li'l' moon, li'l' moon?

What you dreamin', li'l' moon, li'l' moon?
  What you dreamin'?
Ain' you happy in you' gleamin'
  As you 's seemin'?
Don' you heah the watah fallin',
An' the ole Bob White a-callin',
  Li'l' moon, li'l' moon?

ADAM'S WISDOM

"FIRST," said Eve, "I need a gown;"
And frowned a little angry frown
On Adam, who, disturbed thereat,
Said wonderingly, "A gown? What's that?
A gown," he murmured, "What's a gown?"

"Then," said Eve, "I need a hat;
An Easter hat I 'll have, that's flat!"
She smiled, "The nicest hat in town!"
He rubbed his chin and scratched his crown:
"My dear!" he cried, "What is a hat?"

Said Eve, "I need some—other things:
Stockings and shoes and diamond rings.
Please, dearie, for your little wife!"
"I swan!" said Adam. "On my life!
I never heard of all these things!"

Said Eve, "You 're just as mean as mean!
You know we 're not fit to be seen;
Now get yourself—let me advise—
Some pants."—Then Adam smiled, manwise,
"Trousers, my dear, I think you mean."

CUPID AND KITTY

YOU 'VE so much to do, sir!"
I said, "What a pity!"
Said Cupid, "That 's true, sir;
I 've so much to do, sir,
I 'll not bother with you, sir;
I 'll leave you to Kitty."
"You've so much to do, sir!"
I said. What a pity!

TRIOLET TO ROSE

SHE said she adored me.
'Twas by her intended
A season to hoard me.
She said she adored me,
But later ignored me,
By another befriended.
(She said she adored me!)
'Twas by HER INTENDED!

QUESTIONS

I KNOW she thinks of me—
  But *how* thinks she?
  Thinks she kindly?
    Thinks she sadly?
  Thinks she lightly?
    Thinks she badly?
Is she cruel, or is she kind?—
But who may know a woman's mind!

I know she thinks of me—
But *what* thinks she?
  Will she wed me,
    Or refuse me?
  Will she not, or
    Will she choose me?
Prithee, O pretty one, be kind!—
But who may rule a woman's mind!

MAYBE

WHEN I become an angel
I want to thusly sit:
A round jug on the table,
And proper stuff in it;

Tobacco and a briar;
And nothing else to do,
But only smoke and tipple,
And spin a yarn or two.

And if Cecelia beg us
To strum our harps,—why we
Can hire some heavenly urchin
To do our stunts, maybe.